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A VAST NEGLECTED FIELD FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH.*

The territory roughly included in the area known as "The Great Plains," "The Plateau Region," and "The Barren Lands,"—which forms such a vast portion of the North American Continent,—in my opinion, offers an extensive field for co-operative archaeological research, since its prehistoric ethnology is practically unknown.

Its historic ethnology has recently received attention at the hands of energetic, trained anthropologists. Its prehistoric ethnology, or archaeology, however, has been neglected, possibly because modern ethnological problems in that area have held the attention of visiting anthropologists, or perhaps for the reason that, on all that vast area, comparatively little literature or other material was available. Few archaeological sites are known, and literature on the whole subject is scant, even clues to sites being of rare occurrence in papers on other subjects. Archaeological specimens from the region in question, both in museums and in private hands, are not numerous; and those that do exist show a narrow range of forms, and, with few exceptions, have little or no individuality. All these facts have no doubt contributed to the causes of this deplorable neglect. A further reason was probably the supposition that the region was uninhabited until comparatively recent times; that it was an area where only a few finds could be expected as a reward for the persevering toil of the investigator; and that such finds would be of only a few types, of crude technique, and of a low order of art.

Some archaeological work, however, has been done in this area, notably in Wyoming, but by anthropologists chiefly interested in problems relating to the ethnology of the present peoples.

The scarcity of archaeological specimens from this vast area, and the dearth of literature on the whole subject, may be due to the fact that until recently no one fitted to collect or to write

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has visited the region, it having been occupied by white people only lately, and not even visited by them until comparatively recent times. It must also be remembered that the lumbermen, cattlemen, miners, and railroad men, who have made up a large percentage of the white people who have been in the territory, belong to a shifting population, not given to the examination, much less to the preservation, of archaeological objects; while until very recently the number of farmers and settlers has been small. These stable people, having homes, possess means of caring for such specimens as appear to them interesting. Had they been in the region for a longer time, or even in greater numbers, we might have had more data upon which to work.

On the other hand, the scarcity of archaeological material may be due to the comparatively recent occupation of the area by Indians, or to a sparse population, if not to both of these causes. It is quite possible that the Plains were not thickly populated before the introduction of the horse, the acquisition of which, no doubt, gave a great impetus to migration throughout the entire Plains area.

The area, more particularly but roughly defined, includes the western half of the Dakotas, all of Nebraska, the western third of Kansas, Oklahoma, a wide strip north and south through Texas, all of Colorado except a small portion in the southern part of the State, Utah with the exception of a small area in the southeastern part, Nevada, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, and the vast adjacent portion of the British possessions. It includes, among great natural divisions, the upper valley of the Missouri, that of the Platte, the Upper Arkansas, the Great Basin, the Upper Columbia Valley, the Yukon Valley except near the mouth, the Mackenzie Basin, and the area draining into Hudson Bay. Linguistically the area embraces all of the territory inhabited by the peoples of the Kiowan and Kitunahan stocks, and the greater part of the areas inhabited by those of the Siouan, Shoshonean, Caddoan, Athapaskan, and Algonquian stocks. The Siouan, Shoshonean, and Athapaskan areas correspond to that part of the region regarding which we are in perhaps the greatest need of archaeological data.

This whole area separates, or is in part bounded by, the Pueblo and cliff-dwelling culture-area, that of the Mississippi Valley, that of California, and those of the North Pacific coast and the plateaus of Washington and southern British Columbia as now outlined. An exploration of it would probably exactly

define the limits of these culture-areas and the presence or absence of an intermediate culture area or areas.

It must be remembered that pottery of certain well-known kinds is one of the great characteristics or marks of individuality of the Pueblo area and of the prehistoric culture of the Mississippi Valley and forest area to the northeast, while, on the other hand, no ancient pottery is known from the California area or the Northwest coast. Both of these latter regions are so well known, that the absence of pottery, or at least its great scarcity, is determined; but its presence in the wide northern area of the interior of British America is possible. It is true that pottery has been found in Alaska which closely resembles that from the adjacent portion of Siberia. The art of making it may have come from Siberia; so that it does not necessarily lead us to expect to find pottery in the Upper Yukon, the Mackenzie Basin, or, in general, in the Canadian Northwest.

In 1904 I called the attention of the Anthropological Club of Harvard University to the need of archaeological investigation in the area lying between the plateau region of southern British Columbia and the cliff-dwelling and Pueblo region of the Southwest, pointing out at the same time the absence of pottery in the former area, its great development in the latter, and the interest which we have in defining the line separating the region where pottery was made from that where it was not made.

The need of archaeological work in this vast territory is felt by students of historic ethnology. As has already been mentioned, they have started well in working up the area, and they would certainly be interested in the prehistoric relations of their problems. The length of time the various parts of the area have been inhabited, the history of every culture that has developed there, the modification of such cultures as may have been brought into the territory, their causes, and the migrations into and round about over the area,—all these may be mentioned among the problems to be solved.

It is true that in this region we may hardly expect to find archaeological material comparable to that found in the Southwest, Mexico, and Peru, especially the kind that would appeal to architects, artists, travellers, and students of modern history. But, however entertaining it might be to contribute to these interests, it must be borne in mind that archaeological work is not done solely to meet the needs of those interested in

these subjects; it is the professional duty of the archaeologist to reconstruct prehistoric ethnology even in fields that are held to be barren or largely so, and negative results are helpful in arriving at a knowledge of the prehistoric ethnology of the whole of our continent.

Judging from what we know, however, we may expect to solve a number of problems by working over this area. It would seem advisable to conduct this archaeological work in co-operation with students who are investigating living tribes; for a study of the modern Indian of a certain spot throws light on the archaeology of the region, and an understanding of the antiquities of a given place is helpful in the study of its natives. Furthermore, by this system, the continuity of historical problems is met by a continuity of method.

In selecting successive fields of operation, it would seem best to continue explorations in an adjacent area, sufficiently distant from those already examined to present new conditions and give promise that new facts may be discovered, possibly a new culture-area. At the same time a new field of operations should be so near, that no unknown culture-area may intervene. Thus the limits of culture-areas may be determined and new areas be discovered. This method of continuing from past fields of exploration makes valuable the experience gained there in each successive field, while the discoveries in every new region may always lead to a better understanding of the areas previously explored. If the results obtained in an area are not yet printed, the light thrown upon them by later work is at once available for the original publication.

In accord with this plan, it would seem best that those explorers who are familiar with the Pueblo and cliff-dwelling region should examine the adjacent part of this vast area, especially in Kansas, where remains of Pueblos are known to exist, and in the basins which drain into the Colorado and the Rio Grande. To define the limits of Pueblo culture would certainly be of interest to them, while at the same time their exploration in the adjacent country would add to the data needed by their co-workers.

In like manner the anthropologists of California are no doubt nearly as familiar with the prehistoric ethnology of Nevada as are those interested in the Pueblo region. Probably they will be more interested in it; and from their active investigation of the cultures of the prehistoric inhabitants of their State, who depended so much upon that natural product, the

acorn, we are led to look to them for the examination of the region between California and the great Canon of the Colorado. It would seem best that those who have explored in the Lower Columbia Valley and the plateau region of Washington and Southern British Columbia should push their investigations eastward through the area drained by the Columbia and the Snake, thus attempting to define the eastern limits of the Plateau culture, to bound it, and to further our knowledge of it. Again, the explorers of the Mississippi Valley are perhaps best fitted to investigate the western limits of the culture found there. Some of these individuals are already interested in the prehistoric migrations of the Mandan, who are thought to have taken a northwesterly course from the Mississippi to the Missouri. The Historical Society of North Dakota has begun an investigation of the antiquities of its own State. Therefore archaeological investigations in North Dakota may probably be largely left to that society. The Historical Society of Nebraska has expressed a desire to advance archaeological research in its State, and possibly it may be able to explore even more than that part of the field.

From another standpoint, the ethnologists interested in the historic Indians might take up prehistoric ethnological work,—students of the Siouan groups in the Siouan area, those of the Shoshonean group in the Shoshonean area, and students of the Athapascan group in the Athapascan area. By following this line of investigation, the work of just these men would clarify the problems of the whole situation.

HARLAN I. SMITH.